

Rickshaws, Electric Cars Cut India's Pollution

NEW DELHI, India—Pollution around the Taj Mahal has managed to accomplish what centuries of war and natural disaster could not. It has faded the once gleaming walls of India's most celebrated monument and tourist destination. A major contributor to the pollution is traffic.

India is home to three of the world's 10 most polluted cities—New Delhi, Mumbai (formerly Bombay), and Chennai (formerly Madras). The Indian government, USAID, NGOs, and the private sector have banded together to fight pollution by targeting transportation technology.

The efforts not only helped reduce dangerous emissions from buses and other public vehicles, but promote alternative types of transport, including electric motor scooters, electric three-wheel auto rickshaws called "Eco-Ricks," and a small electric car called "REVA."

The bicycle rickshaw ferrying people and goods is a common sight in Indian cities. It is outdated, heavy, and difficult to maneuver through crowded neighborhoods. But it is pollution-free.

USAID supported the development of six prototypes of modern, lightweight rickshaws to encourage drivers to continue using pedaled versions rather than gas-powered ones—especially those that also burn oil—that emit thick clouds of exhaust.

Thousands of these new models now can be seen rolling through the streets of New Delhi and around the city of Agra, near the

Taj Mahal.

With an eye toward forging partnerships between Indian and U.S. companies, USAID also provided startup loans for field testing and marketing new types of motor vehicles. The U.S.-Indian business partnerships brought in U.S. technologies that fit India's performance needs and environmental conditions. Loans from USAID helped reduce the private sector's investment risk, and accelerated the production and commercialization of the new vehicles.

One partner, Pizza Hut, is currently testing electric scooters for delivering pizzas to customers in New Delhi.

Another partner, the Hotel Mughal Sheraton, is using the Eco-Rick to ferry passengers to and from the Taj Mahal. Encouraged by the Sheraton experiment, Bajaj Auto, India's largest manufacturer of two- and three-wheelers, is interested in producing the Eco-Rick commercially. It will manufacture 1,200 vehicles as a pilot over the next 12 months.

Another pioneering vehicle, the battery-powered REVA electric car, can go for up to 50 miles on a single charge. Its battery will last three to four years under normal city driving conditions.

USAID initially funded tests of the



The REVA electric car gets a test drive in New Delhi.

Kristen Kelleher, USAID/India

REVA in the United States and then gave a grant to field test the car in Delhi. By raising public awareness of the benefits of pollution-free vehicles and providing financial assistance to the manufacturer, USAID helped speed the REVA's commercial production.

Air pollution caused by transportation endangers the environment and poses grave health risks for millions of Indians.

Improved bicycle rickshaws and electric vehicles are small but significant contributions toward cleaner air. ★
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